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After a year of the lowest voter turnout in the history of the state, the time is ripe for a new kind of political leadership. We must move on the day. The people who have been elected to office must be the ones who have the best chance of doing well for the city. The time is ripe for a new kind of political leadership.

"1968 - YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY"

by Mayor John H. Reading

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Lakeside Park Garden Center  
666 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland

February 15, 1968

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REMARKS BY MAYOR JOHN H. READING  
"1968 - YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY"  
February 15, 1968

At the time of its founding in 1852, this land of oaks was a beautiful community of industrious settlers proudly anticipating a successful life on the east shore of the Bay. From bustling wharves along the waterfront to rolling hills in the east, the little town was a picture of freedom and prosperity.

One hundred and sixteen years later Oakland finds itself carrying a burden of seemingly overwhelming problems generated by rapid growth; changes in economic climate; and the influx of a new population. We are wearily preoccupied with probing, analyzing and agonizing over poverty, troubled race relations, crime, ghettos, and the ever-increasing search for additional revenues to finance the mushrooming costs of municipal operations and community development. We may be this Country's best researched City!

Some of that research has told us that nearly 75,000 persons in Oakland live on less than the federal income standard labeled "poverty". A third of these persons are single, unattached individuals - most of them elderly - whose survival is threatened by monthly increases in the cost of living. Surprisingly a majority of our poor are white, but poverty among Negroes is totally out of proportion to the percentage of blacks in our total population. Most have lived in hardship for many years and are long-term residents of this City. At times it seems to many that we are being swept away by an undertow of human destitution. I could go on and on with this line of thought as a prophet of doom or as a pessimist, but ladies and gentlemen, I am not a pessimist, I am an optimist, and I think we have dwelled long enough on accentuating our problems. Tonight, I urge that we throw away our crying towels. Let us acknowledge our difficulties, but let's get on with solutions. This year just completed has been one of achievement -- and 1968 is, in fact, a year of real opportunity.

We can reach decisions in this new year which will have a profoundly dramatic impact on our future. One vital opportunity is in downtown redevelopment. A federal grant of nearly 4 million dollars will be combined this year with private action to bring commitments for major construction in downtown Oakland. In the three-block area starting with Fourteenth and Broadway, I foresee development of a 500-room luxury hotel equalling the most impressive accommodations anywhere in the country. The Hyatt Corporation is well along in its negotiations for financing which will enable them to construct a building similar to the Regency in Atlanta. In only a few months the Regency has



become one of the most talked about and heavily used meeting places in America.

This proposal and the recent approach on behalf of Holiday Inns requesting the purchase of air rights over the Eleventh and Broadway parking lot provide convincing evidence that these corporations find Oakland to be an attractive investment opportunity and bide well for the success of this venture. We intend to make this project a catalyst for the revitalization of the entire downtown area including convention facilities, adequate parking and new commercial spaces adjacent to the Rapid Transit station.

Resulting economic and employment benefits - including 700 jobs at the proposed Hyatt project - will have meaning far greater than merely physical renewal of the heart of our City. I pledge the strongest possible leadership from the Mayor's Office with the full backing of the City Council, the Redevelopment Agency, and the business community to see that this opportunity matures during 1968.

Related to this downtown renewal is the fact that Oakland is in demand as a convention and tourist center. The 1967 investment of hotel-motel tax revenues into promotion and services resulted in our hosting 54 conventions involving 20,000 delegates and an estimated spending of 4 million dollars in the City. At this early date, last year's record has already been exceeded by the booking of 57 conventions and we expect some 20 more, with related economic and goodwill benefits. We know that, in addition, many more persons visited this City on private business or as tourists, thereby greatly increasing the demand for accommodations and commercial services and providing a flow of new money.

Through projects of the Redevelopment Agency we will realize for the first time this year benefit from the clearance and reuse of land. Though the residential portion of the Acorn Project has been notorious for its slow start, the commercial and industrial portion has long since been underway. An investment of nearly 8 million dollars has been made by private concerns in the area and this year there will be more tax yield from the commercial zoning itself than we received formerly from the entire Acorn acreage. In addition, over 15 million dollars in federal funds have been invested in the Oak Center Project and a total of 6.7 million dollars is being pumped into the Peralta College development by the Federal government. We are certain that these large governmental expenditures will generate substantial private investment.



A 1968 opportunity of even more direct benefit is the expansion of Port of Oakland facilities to accommodate the new world of transportation and cargo transfer. A few weeks ago contracts which will bring to Oakland this August a direct tie with major Japanese navigation lines were signed in Tokyo. In 1966 total freight handled through the Port of Oakland exceeded that of West Bay facilities. Added to the Matson Company's development, this new contract makes it clear that Oakland is now established as the West Coast's Port of the future. The resulting general economic and employment benefits to this City are of even greater importance when we note that over 20% of the jobs available in the City relate to Port of Oakland enterprises. For example, the Port's Industrial Park now has 39 business tenants which eventually will provide up to 1,800 jobs. Business increase also is reflected in the tremendous surge in passenger and freight volume at the International Airport, with total passenger volume to exceed one and one-half million this coming year.

Possibly the most prominent opportunity of all is the accelerating value of the Coliseum Complex and its use not only by five major league sports organizations but by numerous commercial exhibitors and entertainment events. We are proud of the championship Oakland Raiders and of the Clippers. They have brought honor and national recognition to our City. We welcome with enthusiasm the Basketball Oaks and the Ice Hockey Seals and will strive toward making this year of opportunity one of greater success for them as well.

Another milestone in Oakland's sports history will occur on the evening of Wednesday, April 17, 1968, when the Oakland Athletics host the Baltimore Orioles for this City's first American League baseball game.

Coliseum attendance during its first year more than doubled our projected one million estimate and the Athletics should add another million persons to that total. It has been computed that the Complex injects 70 million dollars a year into the Oakland area economy. We are playing host to fans from throughout Northern California and are providing our own citizens with an exciting array of entertainment and competitive events.

In the past we have discussed employment and poverty in its negative terms and any realistic appraisal must acknowledge the tragic significance of statistics. There are those

The image features a large, semi-transparent watermark of the California State Capitol building in Sacramento. The building is a neoclassical structure with four prominent columns supporting a triangular pediment. The text "Digitized by the Internet Archive in 2025 with funding from State of California and California State Library" is printed in a light gray, sans-serif font across the center of the watermark. The background of the page is white, and the watermark is the primary visual element.

who are content to blame the poor for their own hardship. The poverty program itself has been the target of abuse and ridicule. Welfare aid is a popular topic for political commentary. But we should put aside useless propaganda which will solve no problem. We are developing in Oakland a concerted attack on these problems in an effort to recover human resources through constructive action. The improvement of human condition is not only morally required but is economically justified. The unused human potential in Oakland for working, for earning money, for buying property, for becoming participating citizens, provides a tremendous opportunity which we are beginning to meet. Even if persons now classified as living in poverty were receiving merely the minimum standard of a \$4,000 income for a family of four, the total increased payroll in this City during the coming year would be 34 million. After tax deductions, over 29 million would be injected into the local economy. The portion of this spent for retail purposes alone would give an added spark to many small businesses and would add over \$120,000 in annual sales tax revenues to the City.

To achieve this opportunity we have called on the combined energies and resources of numerous government agencies as well as private organizations and businesses. Using available federal funds, new training schools have been formed and are now well underway. Evidence of our all-out effort is the fact that we are at the point where 5,310 persons now are enrolled in various job training programs. We see this number of trainees being increased by improved operation of a number of programs and more effective placement by the East Bay Skills Center, the Opportunities Industrialization Center, the Adult Minority Project, the Youth Opportunity Program, the Urban League, Spanish-speaking Unity Council, and many others. Starting in March, an additional program for 550 Aircraft Mechanics will begin at World Airways. Laney College will soon begin training an additional 250 badly needed workers for the aircraft industry.

The Manpower Commission, created in 1967 to bring coordination to training and job development efforts, is sponsoring industry-wide meetings to move ahead with even greater employment opportunities for Oakland residents. I have insisted all along that private business and industry must see their role as the primary agents in solving employment problems. The government can provide training facilities and cooperation but ultimately the jobs must come primarily from private business.



Oakland has led the country in developing this cooperation and I am glad to see the federal government now emphasizing the necessity of this joint effort.

It is the Manpower Commission's goal to find training opportunities and meaningful employment for all who need and want it. A significant step toward this objective is the fact that now, by calling the one telephone number 835-4142, a prospective employee or employer may receive information regarding the various job programs, and employment listings are cross referenced by the participating agencies. In the second half of 1967 more than 1,000 persons were placed in jobs from the Skills Center and the O.I.C. Business and government provided over 5,000 jobs for young people last summer and the 1968 summer program planning for an increased number has been underway since last October. Through imaginative efforts of the Recreation Department the youth employment picture was strongly supplemented with a full activity schedule for our young people. Achievement of these goals for maximum employment is extremely difficult but we have made an impressive start and in this year of opportunity we will continue our all-out effort to help meet the employment needs of our people.

Housing for the people of Oakland is another area of increased opportunity in 1968. After years of well-publicized delay the Acorn Project residential plan for 479 units received a 7.9 million dollar FHA loan commitment and is finally underway. What once unhappily was known as "Rilea's Dump" will at last become a new family residential area. Another development which, incidentally, is favored by the City Council over other types of subsidized housing, involves the leasing of privately owned dwellings by the Housing Authority. This program has achieved 603 units of its 1,100 authorized number, and one-half of these involve rehabilitation of formerly substandard properties.

Implementation of Proposition F has reached the first goal through commitments for 500 units, and by the end of the year an additional one thousand low cost so-called "scattered" residences will be in use throughout the City. We are receiving considerable help in over-all policy from the Citizens Advisory Committee on Housing, and with cooperation of both private and public enterprise, this coming year should provide enhanced living opportunity for many more persons of very low income.



But our emphasis is not only on publicly supported housing. In the past year nearly 1,000 units of private residences and apartments were constructed in Oakland with a total value of over 15 million dollars. We look for improvement in the earning power of our citizens and in the national money market to stimulate this growth of private building because Oakland needs and invites residency by persons whose own achievements enable them to select accommodations of higher value.

This positive environment is enhanced by excellent work of several key commissions. The Recreation Department has been most resourceful within budget limitations to maintain a program of remarkable variety. I am most appreciative of their service beyond their original plan this past year in providing an especially interesting summer schedule for some 10,000 poverty target area children. The Commission is succeeding well in its work with Community groups and has encouraged private investment and leadership at new facilities.

Similarly, the Library Department has improved its services within available budgets. They are following plant remodeling schedule, and at the same time developing new programs such as the Latin American Project. Neighborhood participation has supplemented City funds to make branch improvement and expansion possible.

Behind the scenes at temporary Museum facilities a most impressive collection of California history is being assembled. Our citizens and other visitors will have a thrilling experience when the new complex is opened. The fund goal has reached nearly one million and I am very enthusiastic about the contribution this project will make to the Oakland area.

Achievements by the Park Department have been particularly dramatic, especially at the Zoo. Were you aware that attendance reached nine hundred thousand in 1967? This is further proof of Oakland's tourist attraction and of the wisdom shown by the Park Commission in launching the African Veldt project. We look to continued imaginative planning this year. The Department intends to continue its Lake Merritt lighting program and I hope funding of the famous necklace of lights will be possible in the 1968 budget.



Combining the need for human resource development and the improvement of physical environment, 1968 will provide an experiment with an unusual opportunity -- the Model Cities Program. The involvement of all areas of the community in this project will transform the target West Oakland area and I commend the patient and imaginative leadership being given by the City Manager to this activity in the face of problems which are extremely difficult but which I believe can be resolved.

In spite of my emphasis in these remarks on positive opportunities we must face up to a subject of grave concern. Oakland is experiencing an accelerated rate of crime which must have our immediate and effective attention. A home or apartment burglary is enacted every three hours in Oakland. The 1967 total of 5,700 such crimes was a 95% increase over the previous year. Crime is a major crisis in this City.

Let me make one thing absolutely clear: this City Council, through its Manager and its law enforcement department, will maintain law and order in Oakland and enforcement will be carried out with firmness and decisiveness. The Oakland Police Department proposes a partnership between the citizens and police and pledges to work in 1968 for greater public awareness of the facts related to crime. Within the Department over-all crime prevention operations are being studied to determine how to make them more effective. My own experience with two burglaries at the Reading home involved the stripping of everything movable. In desperation I installed a private burglar alarm and within six months we bagged our burglar who, as a result, is now in San Quentin.

Clearly individual citizens have a vital role in the anti-crime battle. Even by taking such relatively simple common sense measures as locking doors and windows the threat of crime can be reduced greatly. Police and citizen partnership in this fight is essential.

To help build this partnership, I am hereby calling for a conference to be held in Oakland among businessmen, leaders of various civic groups and law enforcement officials. The purpose will be to design additional means of stopping crime. This group may consider ways of making home alarm systems more readily available to the average family. Furthermore, the conference may recommend laws and procedures which can strengthen the Police Department's hand in this fight.



Through the meeting, we will seek ways of reducing the attractiveness of criminal activity among the young and will make plans to insure the safety of our streets to the people who live here.

Though safety itself is an important objective, I think we should also work to make Oakland a more attractive place in which to live. The Pride in Oakland Committee has announced a citywide project for March of this year to promote the planting of more trees and the improvement of our neighborhoods. In the past year this committee experienced dramatic results through participation by neighborhood associations in cleanup projects. The well-publicized McElroy Street group was an example to other self-help efforts throughout the City. The Pride Committee, with cooperation of the Park and Street and Engineering Department, provides an opportunity for any group in the City to respond to this call for self-organized projects. In fact, all of the opportunities about which I am speaking tonight require the affirmative participation by our citizens. We cannot hope to achieve these significant goals without the constructive help of all persons.

In addition to the physical beauty which we can achieve in Oakland, we also have a meaningful cultural life. The Oakland Symphony has received worldwide recognition, and the opening of our Museum in the spring of next year will provide an exciting drama of California history. Because of increased interest in a number of cultural activities, I have proposed the creation of a Cultural Commission to help give direction to these activities and will ask the City Council to consider appropriate legislation.

It is a pleasure to have members of the Oakland Board of Education here tonight, especially in view of the increasing inter-relationship we have in long range planning, use of Federal grants, and the Model Cities development. In this new year we have created a liaison committee to deal with joint city and school business. I hopefully suggest that by such efforts we will develop a few solutions and expand opportunities relating to Oakland's educational needs.

Within our own City operations the Council has been well advised by our City Manager in developing a firm and realistic financial program and in developing a more workable and efficient structure of City Government itself. However, many of the improvements which could benefit Oakland are limited by provisions incorporated into the outdated City Charter. The Council has



directed a special Citizens Committee to propose revisions of the Charter for the November, 1968 ballot. This will involve consideration of increased City Manager responsibility for the various government departments and a streamlining of governmental procedures. For example, it is reported that present legal advertising requirement involve costly and for the most part unnecessary procedures. Amendment of the provisions for advertising of ordinances and bids could save the City some \$35,000 per year equivalent to a half cent on the tax rate. Similarly greater use of the electronic data processing equipment could make accounting functions of the various departments unnecessary resulting greater efficiency and economies. Charter revision has many ramifications which need to be understood by our citizens but a basic fact is this: A saving of hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual expenditures could be achieved by adoption of a modern City Charter. I hope that the citizens of Oakland will take the opportunity given to them later this year to adopt a Charter suitable to the operation of a modern City government.

As I have indicated throughout my remarks tonight, achievement of success in realizing these opportunities is a matter of total community involvement whether it be in terms of employment or housing or crime control, culture, beautification or streamlining of government operations. In dealing constructively with the needs of Oakland, an encouraging achievement of 1967 has been the increased participation by the public - from all economic, social and racial groups. I am particularly grateful to the men and women who volunteer their services on City Boards and Commissions, thus enabling our government to function democratically and effectively. This dinner tonight offers us the chance to say "thank you" to these citizens who serve without pay in numerous unpublicized positions - often devoting hours of valuable time each week. As members of Boards and Commissions you have a particularly vital role to be played in our realization of the opportunities outlined tonight.

Though the Mayor traditionally receives more than his share of the blame when citizens are unhappy, he also is given a great deal of credit for good work done by the City staff and by members of the Council. We should recognize the skilled leadership by our City Manager as he strengthens government organization and guides this City through extremely critical financial conditions. Jerry, you are doing



it very well. The City staff, represented here by department heads also deserves commendation for their dedication and our appreciation for accepting the challenge of new programs and responsibilities.

I know you will also join with me in applauding the members of the Oakland City Council. They have spent more time in public meetings, study sessions and attending district activities than was ever done before. These men have accepted heavy responsibilities because of the increasing work load and changing nature of City business. I owe a personal debt to councilmen who have attended numerous functions on my behalf at times when schedules prevented my own participation; and I want to express my personal appreciation publicly for their guidance, wisdom and patience in dealing with the many trying issues which confront us daily.

On behalf of the City Council I ask for your continued help, not only on the particular business before your own agency, but in the total concerns of Oakland. You are opinion leaders as well as policy-makers. By working together, we can deal effectively with Oakland's many problems and we can realize the great potential which is here.

1968 is a year of opportunity. Let's make it one of achievement!

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